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THE GARDEN CALENDAR

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A radio discussion by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations, Wednesday, March 14, 1934.

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Hello folks. There seem to be evidence of the coming of spring in your Capital City today, although on last Saturday night we had a fairly heavy snow and there is still plenty of snow and ice in the protected places which means that there is a decided chill in the air. Only a day or two ago I heard a market gardener remark that he had been unable to get hotbeds started and that he was away behind in starting early plants and other spring gardening work. I am of the opinion that a lot of you folks who live in sections where old King Winter is still holding sway are behind in your preparations for planting your gardens. You lucky folks in the South don't have snow and sleet and cold to hold you back and you are away ahead of the rest of us.

Today I want to mention a few of the things that we can do in order to be ready to plant our gardens when the season does warm up. For example, take that matter of pruning grape vines and fruits in general. In my own case, under normal winter conditions I prune my fruit trees and grape vines during January or in February at the latest. This is the 14th of March and I have not even pruned a grape vine. I usually have one dormant spray on my fruit trees by early January then put on the second spray about this time, but up to the present I have not even gotten the sprayer out of storage. Of course my job of pruning and spraying is a small one as I only have about thirty fruit trees of various kinds and a few rows of grapes, raspberries and other small fruits, but the pruning and spraying are mighty important factors in the production of good fruit. I am simply getting everything in readiness and if I catch a calm day this week or next I propose to drop everything else and get that spray on my trees.

With regard to starting plant beds, the old bed can be cleaned out the manure hauled and piled ready to be put into the bed. The sash used for covering the bed can be gotten out of storage, repaired, any broken glass replaced and the woodwork repainted. Gardeners who have small greenhouses or heated plant beds in which to start their early plants certainly have an advantage over their neighbors who depend upon coldframes or ordinary cloth-covered plant beds. Right now I have tomato, pepper and lettuce plants coming on in my stove-heated greenhouse. My tomato plants have been transplanted once and by the time I can set them in the garden they will be growing in 6-inch flower pots and will be strong, stocky plants about 8 inches high and most likely the first cluster of fruit will be set.

I start melons, cucumber, and summer squashes in the greenhouse long before it is safe to plant the seeds in the open. I use paper bands or sometimes quart berry boxes to hold the soil in which I plant the seeds of the vine crops. I believe I like the paper bands best because it is often quite difficult to remove the quart berry boxes without disturbing the soil about the roots of the plants. For making the paper bands I take any rather stiff and fairly waterproof
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paper that does not contain tar or creosote and I cut it into strips 3-1/2 or 4 inches wide and about 14 inches long then fasten them together in the form of a band with paper fasteners or by pinning them with wooden toothpicks. These bands may be placed close together in the plant bed, filled with good soil and the seeds planted directly in them, then when it come to transferring the plants to the garden you simply slip a trowel underneath the plants, lift them and place them on a board or in a shallow tray and carry them to the garden.

Another thing that will save time later is to get your supply of garden seeds and have them on hand. You northern gardeners, who like myself, have been unable to do much toward getting your gardens in shape for planting may be able to haul a few loads of compost and spread it on your garden and your truck patches. Under present conditions there is certain to be a rush of farm work just as soon as the season opens and whatever we do this year we do not want to neglect our home gardens. As the boy said "that's where a lot of our 'eats' come from" and we all like good think to eat. I often think of this habit of eating as a sort of foolish habit but I have never been quite able to break myself of the habit of wanting at least three good meals a day.

Just as soon now as we can get it we want to prune our grapes, raspberries, blackberries and tie them securely to supports. By the way if you prune your grape vines late in the winter they are apt to bleed at the cut ends. That loss of sap is of course a drain on the vitality of the plants but it will not kill them and given the choice between late pruning and the attendant bleeding and not pruning at all I would say prune by all means, especially in the case of our American bunch grapes such as Concord and Niagara and others. And, while I am on the subject of pruning let me suggest that it is time that your climbing roses be looked after and very moderately pruned. The time to give climbing roses their main pruning is after they finish blooming, but at this time any long or straggly shoots should be headed back and perhaps a little of the old wood thinned out and the stems securely tied to supports. In the case of your bush roses you want to cut away all winter-killed wood and prune rather heavily as the flowers come on the new wood that is formed this spring. If you have any spring blooming shrubs like Forsythia, Spirea and Deutzia that bloom early, do not prune them until after they bloom. If you do you will simply be cutting off the wood that bears the flowers. In the case of the Hydrangeas and the shrubs that bloom later in the season, they produce their flowers on new wood and so should be given their main pruning in the spring before they start. My suggestion to all gardeners in the sections where the season is backward is to get everything ready then as soon as the conditions are right to pitch right in and do whatever is necessary to get the plantings around the home in order also to prune and spray the fruits and plant a good garden, and I'll do all I can to help you.

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